

will be passed by the House Chamber later today.

GUN CONTROL AND MENTAL ILLNESS

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, the main reason I come to the floor today is to talk about the President's most recent Executive action, this time implementing gun control measures that won't actually solve any of the problems they purport to fix and that purposely go around Congress and ignore the will of the American people. To my mind, this is one of the most aggravating things about Washington, DC, and about how business is done here. People make symbolic acts claiming that we have to "do something" but don't actually focus on a solution that actually helps make the problem better.

None of the President's proposals actually would reduce any of the horrific incidents of gun violence we have seen, and that is a shame because there are bipartisan proposals that have been made that actually would help. But it is only when the President works with the Congress, as the Constitution requires, before a bill can become law. In his eagerness to go it alone, of course, the President has forsaken the constitutional process and bypassed the electorate in trying to make new policy.

He presumably is doing this as a hallmark of his tenure, and it will somehow be a legacy of his time as President. But the fact of the matter is Executive action signed by this President will not survive his own Presidency unless it is actually made into law, and then, of course, it would require another act of Congress to overcome it. That is something this President doesn't seem to recognize. When he gets frustrated with the pace at which Congress takes up legislation—for example, the immigration issue—he decides to unilaterally issue an Executive action—which does what? Well, he offers Executive actions as a solution to a problem. But, in fact, what it does is it buys a lawsuit and it gets caught up in litigation, which is going to take years to resolve and ultimately doesn't provide any relief to the very people the President claims to want to help.

So as a result of the President's impatience and his eagerness to go it alone, he is actually forsaking the constitutional process that builds consensus and actually creates durable policies that will survive this President's own administration.

This isn't just an isolated event, as I mentioned a moment ago. According to one media report, the Obama administration aims to push almost 4,000 new regulations during his last year as President. But with his announcement last week, President Obama made clear he has little interest in working with Congress. That is actually his job—to work with Congress, to work with us to try to find consensus and to build dura-

ble solutions to the problems that confront our Nation. It also demonstrates his lack of regard for fundamental constitutional rights as spelled out in the Constitution itself. Of course, I am talking about the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

I found his rhetoric particularly perplexing. First, he blamed the Congress for inaction. He said: "Congress still needs to act." Well, actually, if what he was doing was going to solve the problem, why would Congress still need to act? So to me it is an admission that he knows that this is mere symbolism and it doesn't actually solve the problem that he says exists.

So he said Congress still needs to act on gun control measures, and he claimed that this legislative body—the Congress—is simply not being responsive to the will of the American people. He even said that he feels compelled to act without consulting Congress because America doesn't "have a Congress that is in line with the majority of Americans."

In other words, the President said the people of this country are demanding more symbolic gun control laws, not less.

But that is not what the polling shows, the best indicator of what people are actually thinking—other than what the Presiding Officer hears from her constituents in Iowa and I hear from my constituents in Texas. Those are the best ways to know what people are thinking. In a poll done by the Wall Street Journal and NBC News this fall, more than half of the respondents said that the President's party's position on gun control was "outside the mainstream." Only 38 percent said that it was "within the mainstream."

It is also critical to point out that, as many media reports have indicated, the President's measures would not have stopped any of the mass violence incidents that have tragically struck American communities over the last few years.

So my response to the President is this: If he is actually serious about trying to solve problems rather than just issue symbolic proclamations, he needs to roll up his sleeves and he needs to work with us to move legislation forward that focuses on the commonsense thread found in many of these mass incidents, and that has to do with the mental health issue. This is the 800-pound gorilla in the room that the President doesn't want to talk about.

The chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Senator GRASSLEY, has made it quite clear that this is the one issue where we could actually find consensus and help provide assistance to families and communities to help people from becoming a danger to themselves as well as the communities in which they live.

We know from the facts of the cases that many times the mental health of the shooter has played a role in many of these tragedies, and it must be addressed. Many Americans, of course,

agree. I think, for example, of Adam Lanza, who was the shooter at Sandy Hook in Connecticut. He was so mentally ill that he was a recluse in his own home, and the only thing his mother found she could engage him in was going out to a shooting range. Yet he basically stole his mother's own weapons, killed her, and then tragically went to Sandy Hook Elementary School and killed a number of innocent children. If he and she had been able to get some additional help—gotten him to a doctor and gotten him on medications that could have helped him from this increasing mental illness—then perhaps things would have turned out differently. That is speculation on all our parts, but perhaps treating the mental illness will actually reduce the likelihood that people will succumb to an impulse to do harm to themselves and to their communities.

According to a poll released just last week, more than 70 percent of Americans said they believe that better access to mental health treatment and screening would reduce these incidents of violence. I am part of that 70 percent. I firmly believe that time and again we are confronted with mental illness crises that go untreated and turn into tragic headlines. We can't responsibly stand by any longer and watch this pattern repeat itself. That is why last year I introduced a piece of legislation that was my effort to try to begin this conversation and this discussion here in the Senate.

There are other ideas. The chairman of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, Senator ALEXANDER, and the ranking member, Senator MURRAY, are working on some mental health reform legislation. Congressman TIM MURPHY in the House has worked on a comprehensive bill, and in the Senate Dr. BILL CASSIDY is working on that legislation. My legislation, hopefully, will help contribute to the conversation and help us build that consensus that is so important.

The legislation I have introduced would improve treatment and preventive screenings and crisis response for individuals with mental illness. It would also strengthen the existing background check system, something the President says he wants to do. However, the fact of the matter is that many States, such as the State of Virginia in the case of the Virginia Tech shooter just a short time ago, don't even upload existing mental health adjudications into the background check system, which would have precluded the purchase of a firearm by somebody with that sort of record. So the National Instant Criminal Background Check System isn't even a comprehensive system when it comes to identifying people who under current law should not be able to purchase a firearm.

This legislation I have offered is a step forward that will help those with mental illness get the support they need while also equipping our Nation's

law enforcement officers to help keep our communities safe. It has been endorsed by a diverse group of organizations, including the National Alliance on Mental Illness, the National Association of Police Organizations, and the National Association of Social Workers.

I think the thing that has perhaps offended some of our Democratic colleagues is that we have actually been able to build a consensus, where none other has existed on this topic, by getting organizations such as the ones I mentioned, along with the National Rifle Association, to endorse the legislation I have introduced.

The fact of the matter is this legislation was aided by solutions borrowed from what is happening in Texas and particularly Bexar County and San Antonio, where I once served as a district judge.

I firmly believe that the best way we can legislate here is to learn what works at the local and State level and then to scale them up here at the national level, rather than to do what the President seems to prefer, which is a national experiment and a one-size-fits-all approach in a country that is simply too diverse on issues that are so complex that we can't really solve them with the wave of a magic wand or on a national basis. So let's look at what works locally and in our States and then bring those experiences here and scale them up for the benefit of the rest of the country.

The fact of the matter is that Bexar County's and San Antonio's mental health program is now touted as the national standard for how to think strategically about those suffering from mental illness in the criminal justice system. Sheriff Pamerleau of Bexar County told me that a substantial portion of the jail population in San Antonio is people suffering from mental illness. Many times they go untreated and, thus, they try to self-medicate with drugs or alcohol, just making their condition that much worse. But the underlying cause of their problem is never being treated, which is the underlying mental illness.

I have heard the same story in Houston and Austin and other places. I have asked our law enforcement professionals—we simply are seeing more and more people with mental illnesses showing up in emergency rooms or living homeless on the street or ending up in our jails without their problems adequately being addressed. My legislation does try to take a crack at that. It may not be perfect. I know other people will have other ideas, but at least it is a constructive suggestion and will hopefully begin a conversation that we need to have and the President says he wants to have but so far has neglected to engage in.

Congress has a role to play because we represent the American people and we represent the States where we are elected to serve. It is our responsibility to try to bring about successful re-

forms that we have seen work at the local and State levels. I am hopeful the Senate Judiciary Committee will hold a hearing soon. I understand we may well begin by the end of this month, and it is not a minute too soon.

We need a President who is willing to get to work and do his job and not just to make speeches or issue Executive orders and say: Well, look, I have done my part, and the rest is up to everybody else. We need a President who is willing to work with us and alongside of us to tackle these important issues and hopefully help protect the individuals who are suffering from mental illness, to give families more choices when dealing with a mentally ill loved one, and also hopefully to avoid these incidents of mass violence. What we don't need is purporting to govern by Executive edict, which is what the President seems to like and prefer.

I hope the President understands that Members on both sides of the aisle in both Chambers are ready, willing, and able in good faith to work to reform our mental health system and in doing so help prevent some of the tragedies that are occurring in our communities. What we don't need to do is to restrict the constitutional rights of law-abiding citizens, which will in no way make our communities safer but will infringe upon those constitutional rights in the Bill of Rights of the U.S. Constitution.

Many of the bills proposed, including mine, go much further than what the President announced last week in dealing with mental illness. There is a lot of work that needs to be done, and we need a President who will work with us. If he is willing to abandon this go-it-alone attitude and commit to working with the elected representatives of the American people, I think we have the opportunity to accomplish a lot for our country.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. PETERS. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRIBUTE TO RICK CARTER

Mr. PETERS. Madam President, 8 months ago, as I delivered my maiden speech in the Senate, I discussed how honored I am to have succeeded Senator Carl Levin, a mentor to me and a man who defined what it meant to be a Senator from Michigan—a feeling that has only deepened during the past year that I have served in this body.

During his 36 years of service, Senator Levin personally met tens of thousands of Michiganders. He remains beloved by many, including those who might never have had the opportunity to shake his hand or sit down next to

him. This is due in no small part to his tireless commitment and accessibility in responding to questions and comments from his constituents, whether those issues arose in person, over the phone, in a letter, or—during the latter half of Senator Levin's tenure—email. Michiganders reaching out to his office knew that they would be heard and that they could expect a thoughtful, honest response about their Senator's positions.

These responses—hundreds of thousands a year and millions over the course of Senator Levin's career—were made possible by his correspondence manager, Rick Carter. Rick worked for Senator Levin for almost two decades, and I have had the privilege to have him on my team since early last year.

While I have known him for only a year, this has been more than enough time to learn that Rick is a model public servant and a role model for generations of congressional staffers. Rick is humble, thoughtful, and fiercely committed to working behind the scenes to help other staff succeed and to grow. He has been instrumental in establishing my Senate office, and I will be eternally grateful for this honorary Michigander's efforts.

Rick grew up in DC. Perhaps his future career was foreshadowed by growing up in the Michigan Park neighborhood. He was a standout student at DeMatha Catholic High School and earned a scholarship at George Washington University, where he studied sociology.

During his time at GW, he interned for Congressman JOHN CONYERS, a legend of the civil rights movement, current Dean of the House of Representatives, and a man I am honored to call my friend and a Michigan colleague.

Graduating from GW in 1995, Rick began what would be a 19-year career with Senator Levin. He worked his way up from the front office and mastered a number of different positions before deciding that managing the correspondence team best allowed him to balance engaging on matters of policy, serving the people of Michigan, and mentoring junior staffers.

While Rick has many skills and qualities you might expect from a seasoned staffer, including being an excellent writer, editor, and consummate professional, it is his extraordinary commitment to developing young minds that I wish to focus on for a moment.

Rick has helped dozens and perhaps hundreds of young graduates, former interns, and junior staffers find jobs in public service. Along with refining writing skills and polishing resumes, Rick has taught a generation of staffers things they did not learn in college: how to be a professional, how to show up on time, and how to simultaneously function independently as well as part of a team. His former interns are legislative directors, chiefs of staff, and chief counsels. The list of favors he is owed is extensive, but he never asks for anything in return.